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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 000767

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR, INR/TNC

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TAGS: PINR PTER KISL TD
SUBJECT: CARIBBEAN MUSLIM FORUM IN T&T

REF: A. A. SECSTATE 064703

IB. B. PORT OF SPAIN 00618

Classified By: A/DCM A. D. Miller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

I1. (U) The 2006 Caribbean Muslim Forum took place at the Trinidad campus of the University of the West Indies on June 18-19. Pol intern attended forum. Approximately 40-50 people attended, most from Trinidad but with a handful from throughout the region. The crowd was made up of about 2/3 East Indian and 1/3 African-ethnic. The Central Zakah Organization of Trinidad and Tobago organized the conference and invited Dr. Monzer Kahf, a Syrian-born American, to speak on the Muslim pillar of Zakah, or almsgiving. Dr. Kahf is a leading expert on Muslim economics, and has worked for the governments of Pakistan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Information on Dr. Kahf's publications can be found on website <http://monzerkahf.com/about.html>.

I2. (U) During Dr. Kahf's lecture, a participant asked, &Should forceful means be used to collect Zakah from Muslims who are otherwise lax in their giving?8 Dr. Kahf responded that since Zakah is a tenet of Islam, giving Zakah is crucial. He further stated that giving Zakah must be sincere and come from one's love for Allah. Dr. Kahf closed by saying that forcefully collecting Zakah is just as bad as not giving Zakah. Dr. Kahf's response provoked a few grumbles from some of the Afro-Trini Muslims in attendance. (NOTE: The extremist Jamaat Al-Muslimeen (JAM) is largely Afro-Trini in composition. The grumbles may have come from JAM and sympathizers. END NOTE.)

I3. (U) Most participants appeared to be Sunni Muslim with a few participants who may have been Shiite based on their clothing. Some of the high profile participants included Rasheed Inusah the Ghanaian deputy-Ambassador to Cuba, and Mohammed Hajja, the Secretary-General of the Latin American Islamic Council, based in Argentina. Also of note were Muhammed Soleiman, a Palestinian Imam living in Puerto Rico for the past few decades, and Imam &Omer8, an Englishman running a Muslim outreach program in Mexico.

I4. (C) COMMENT: The Jamaat Al Muslimeen (JAM) is composed mostly of Afro-Trini Muslims. Its jailed leader, Yasin Abu Bakr, was arrested for threatening violence against Muslims who did not pay their zakah to the JAM. The grumbles from the Afro-Trini Muslims may have been to show their displeasure with the idea of not using force to seize Zakah. While there were private breakout sessions for high-ranking Imams and Muslim representatives, discussions to which we are not privy, the public forum was far more technical than ideological. A calculator and math skills were more useful

than a pen. END COMMENT.
AUSTIN